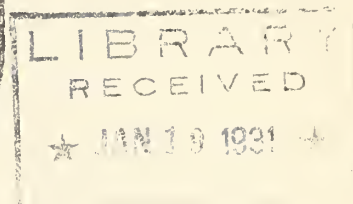
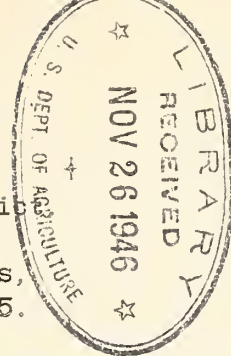


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Excerpt from a radio talk by
W. R. M. Wharton, chief, eastern district
Federal Food and Drug Administration,
through WJZ and associated NBC stations,
Monday, January 5, 1931. Serial No. 35.



HOW TO READ THE LABEL

Headache remedies

The Federal food and drugs act requires that any medicinal preparation which contains any alcohol, morphine, opium, cocaine, heroin, alpha or beta eucaine, chloroform, cannabis indica, chloral hydrate or acetanilid or any derivative of such substances, must carry a label which states the quantity or proportion of the content of these drugs. Now what is the reason for this requirement? The reason is that the drugs named are habit forming and the users of preparations containing them are entitled to know exactly what quantities and proportions of these dangerous and habit forming drugs are contained therein. The law does not require the manufacturer to warn the consumer that these drugs are potentially dangerous. It assumes that the consumer has this knowledge. The manufacturer may not, however, disarm suspicion by saying that his preparation is harmless, or that it will not affect the heart, or otherwise create the impression that his medicine may be taken with impunity.

Now the significance of this particular form of labeling in relation to headache preparations is that headache remedies, so-called, often contain one or more of these dangerous drugs.

Headache powders, pills and granular preparations often contain acetanilid. Quoting from the U. S. Dispensatory to illustrate the dangerous nature of this drug:

"Two distinct types of acetanilid poisonings must be recognized: one in which the symptoms are caused by a single large dose, and the other by repeated use of the drug over long periods of time. The frequency with which the laity employ various mixtures containing acetanilid is a serious danger to the welfare of the community."

Acetphenetidin, or phenacetin, is another product commonly used in headache preparations which must be declared on the label because it is a derivative of acetanilid. It, too, is a dangerous drug.

Various drugs---not required by law to be declared on the label---are used in headache mixtures. These include antipyrine; various salicylates, such as ammonium and sodium; and some of the benzoates, including benzol benzoate. Such drugs, however, cannot be considered harmless. In fact, any drug which has the property of deadening the sensation of pain cannot be regarded as harmless.

In view of the facts stated, label readers are cautioned against the indiscriminate use of headache preparations as such. Those that contain opiates or acetanilid and its derivatives dull the sensibilities to pain. Those that contain acetanilid or its derivatives may have a depressing action on the heart and many people are very susceptible to this class of drugs, and headache preparations may have other dangerous substances in them than those which are required by law to be declared on the label. Why does the law require a label statement of the proportion of the content of the various drugs named? It is for the benefit of the consumer, so that he may read the label and determine whether any of these ingredients are contained; and so that he may buy such products with the full knowledge that the named drugs contained in them may be dangerous when not used with caution and with regard to the injury which each is capable of doing.

Many of the so-called headache cures on the market will tend to relieve simple headaches temporarily. But the buyer must recognize the danger attending the use of these preparations and their limitations. Headache remedies simply relieve the pain of the headache temporarily and do not eradicate the cause or effect a cure. You should remember that headaches may result from many causes, such as head injury, eye strain, gastro-intestinal disturbances, nervous disorders. Headache remedies will not cure any of these conditions.

You should remember that headaches may be the initial symptom of some acute diseases. When you take a headache remedy, you may be obscuring or masking important symptoms of disease with resultant dangerous delay in beginning proper treatment for that disease.

There are five general types of headache preparations which may be listed as follows: (1) Anodynes, (2) Laxatives, (3) Antacids, (4) Combination of the foregoing, (5) Counterirritants, such as Poultices, Plasters, Salves, Liniments and Inhalants.

An anodyne is an agent which tends to relieve pain by blunting or diminishing one's sensibilities to pain, hence an anodyne is anything that calms or comforts the feelings. Most common headache anodynes are aspirin, acetanilid and its derivatives, acetphenatidin or phenacetin, and antipyrine. These preparations act on the nerve centers to deaden and depress the feeling of pain.

Laxatives are often represented as cures for headaches. When headaches are the result of temporary constipation, a laxative may, by evacuating the intestines, relieve some of the conditions which cause the headache, and therefore may also relieve the headache, but laxatives will not relieve headaches which result from other causes. These may relieve a headache only when it is due to temporary constipation.

The third common type of headache preparation usually contains an antacid, the most common of which are sodium bicarbonate and milk of magnesia. Preparations containing antacids are effective in the relief of headaches only when the headache results from excessive acidity of the

stomach secretions. They act by neutralizing the excess acidity and they also may have a slight laxative effect.

The fourth type of the commercial headache preparations on the market are combinations of the three types already named.

A fifth type is the type which is used externally. Such preparations are intended to act as counterirritants and stimulate the circulation of the blood in the portions of the body where applied, and sometimes these tend to relieve temporarily some headaches. Examples of such preparations are salves and liniments, plasters, hot and cold compresses and preparations intended to relieve nasal congestion, such as sprays and inhalants.

If your headache is caused by eye strain, you had better see an oculist. If it is caused by lack of rest, take a nap. If it is caused by working in dimly lighted or poorly ventilated rooms or by other external conditions, correct these conditions. If your sleeping room is improperly ventilated, provide more fresh air, as such simple expedients are often excellent for simple headache not caused by definite body ailments. If your headache is caused by intestinal trouble or nervous disorders or any one of a dozen or more maladies which should be treated at the source, then see your physician, for you will rely at your peril on temporary relief obtained from so-called headache cures.

In the purchase and use of all medicinal preparations you should use good judgment, good common sense and, read the labels for any warning they may furnish as to the nature of the product you are taking for a headache.

The food and drugs act prohibits labels on patent medicines from making any false and fraudulent claims of therapeutic value. But labels on headache remedies do not always stay within the limits of strict truth with respect to curative claims. Notwithstanding that scores of manufacturers of such preparations have been prosecuted for violating the food and drugs act, there are still on the market many such preparations which go beyond the limits of exact truth in their claims of curative value.

Remember that headache remedies generally relieve the discomfort due to simple headache-- they do nothing more than this. Remember that you have a means of determining whether such preparations contain certain habit forming and dangerous drugs. Read the label. There is no requirement that drug preparations must reveal on the labels their complete composition. If there were such a requirement it would be possible for you to find out with accuracy what they are made of simply by reading the labels. Hence it becomes more important for you to have a conception of the general composition of these products, and a definite idea as to their limitations, and a certain and fixed idea as to their danger.

Some manufacturers voluntarily state on their labels the complete formulas for their products. This enables the consumer to know exactly what he is taking. When such information is given, the food and drugs act requires that it be accurate.